

Message Text

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P R 041015Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3882
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 MANILA 5323

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, RP
SUBJECT: LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS: WIND-UP OF THE CAMPAIGN

REF: (A) MANILA 2940; (B) MANILA 4260

1. SUMMARY: THE NEW SOCIETY MOVEMENT (KBL) OF
PRESIDENT MARCOS WILL WIN OVERWHELMINGLY IN THE APRIL 7
ELECTIONS AND MARCOS WILL FULLY CONTROL THE NEW INTERIM
PARLIAMENT. IN THE PROVINCES THERE IS ONLY SCATTERED
SIGNIFICANT OPPOSITION TO THE KBL. IN METRO MANILA,
HOWEVER, MARCOS CANDIDATES, LED BY IMELDA, ARE
CONFRONTED WITH SERIOUS OPPOSITION FROM THE LABAN
HEADED BY NENIGNO AQUINO. BY ALL CREDIBLE ACCOUNTS
THE LABAN IN AN HONEST ELECTION SHOULD WIN A SUBSTANTIAL
NUMBER, PERHAPS A MAJORITY OF THE TWENTY-ONE SEATS IN
THE METRO AREA. MARCOS, HOWEVER, APPEARS DETERMINED
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THAT IMELDA AND THE KBL SWEEP THE MANILA ELECTIONS
WHATEVER THE COST IN CREDIBILITY. THUS WE ANTICIPATE
MAJOR FRAUD AND MANIPULATION DIRECTED BY MARCOS.
THIS WILL ENGENDER A PUBLIC OUTCRY FROM THE OPPOSITION,
A POSSIBLE RISE IN DISORDER, AND A PROBABLE INCREASE
IN FESTERING RANCOS WITHIN THE BODY POLITIC. IN SHORT, WE
ENVISAGE A PERIOD OF HEIGHENED TENSION AND UNCERTAINTY.

END SUMMARY.

2. AS THE 45-DAY CAMPAIGN FOR THE APRIL 7 ELECTIONS FOR THE INTERIM PARLIAMENT COMES TO AN END MIDNIGHT APRIL 5, IT MIGHT BE USEFUL TO REVIEW THE MAIN FEATURES OF THE CAMPAIGN AND TO PROJECT WHAT LIES AHEAD.

3. AS NOTED AT THE OUTSET OF THE CAMPAIGN (REF A), IT IS A FOREGONE CONCLUSION THAT PRESIDENT MARCOS AND HIS KBL PARTY ARE ASSURED OF AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY IN THE NEW INTERIM LEGISLATURE. THERE WILL LIKELY BE A SMALL NUMBER OF SEATS WON BY NON-KBL CANDIDATES IN THE VISAYAS, MINDANAO, AND ELSEWHERE. THERE MAY EVEN BE A TOKEN NUMBER OF OUTRIGHT LABAN OPPOSITIONISTS ELECTED IN THE METRO MANILA AREA. THERE WILL PROBABLY BE A MODEST NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT-MINDED KBL CANDIDATES WHO WILL GAIN SEATS AND WHO MAY PLAY A CONSTRUCTIVELY CRITICAL PARLIAMENTARY ROLE. BUT THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT MARCOS WILL FULLY CONTROL THE NEW PARLIAMENT.

4. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT MARCOS AND IMELDA HAVE BEEN CAMPAIGNING AS IF THEIR POLITICAL SURVIVAL WERE AT STAKE. WITH LITTLE EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION IN THE PROVINCES, THE FOCUS OF MARCOS EFFORTS HAS BEEN IN MANILA AND THE TARGET HAS BEEN THEIR ARCH ENEMY BENIGNO AQUINO WHO HEADS THE LABAN SLATE IN THE CONFIDENTIAL

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METRO AREA. INDEED, THE MARCOSES HAVE MADE AQUINO, AND THE RELATED CHANGE OF U.S. INTERVENTION PRIMARY ISSUES IN THE CAMPAIGN. OTHER MORE SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES HAVE BEEN RELEGATED TO THE BACKGROUND

5. NOTWITHSTANDING RECENTLY PUBLISHED GOP POLLS WHICH SHOW THE KBL SWEEPING ALL 21 SEATS IN METRO MANILA, OUR CLEAR SENSE IS THAT AQUINO AND THE OPPOSITION LABAN SLATE CONTINUE TO RUN STRONGLY. WE BELIEVE THAT IN AN HONEST VOTE, LABAN WOULD WIN A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER, PERHAPS A MAJORITY OF THE METRO SEATS. SOME OF THE LABAN CANDIDATES, WE ESTIMATE, COULD QUITE LIKELY COME IN AHEAD OF IMELDA. THIS, WE BELIEVE, EXPLAINS THE FRENETIC CAMPAIGNING BY THE MARCOSES IN THE PAST TWO TO THREE WEEKS, THE VIRULENCE OF THEIR ATTACKS AGAINST AQUINO AND HIS PARTY AND THEIR REPEATED ALLEGATIONS OF SUPPORT TO THE OPPOSITION FROM "FOREIGN MEDDLERS."

6. THE FOREIGN SUPPORT THEME IS NOT NEW IN THE PHILIPPINES. IT HAS APPEARED IN EVERY MAJOR POLITICAL

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CAMPAIGN HERE OVER THE PAST 25 YEARS. NEVERTHELESS, IT
USUALLY HAS BEEN LEVELED BY THE OPPOSITION AGAINST THE
GOVERNMENT. FURTHER, THERE SEEMS TO BE AN ADDED EMOTIONAL
ELEMENT IN THE THEME THIS TIME, REFLECTING MARCOS'
SENSITIVITY OVER U.S. INITIATIVES IN HUMAN RIGHTS AND
THE AQUINO CASE. DESPITE OUR PRIVATE REMONSTRATIONS,
MARCOS HAS CONTINUED TO PRESS HIS CHARGE OF "FOREIGN
(NOTABLY U.S.) MEDDLING." WE HAVE FOUND FEW FILIPINOS
HOWEVER, WHO TAKE THESE ALLEGATIONS VERY SERIOUSLY.

7. THAT THE LABAN IS APPARENTLY DOING SO WELL IS
REMARKABLE GIVEN THE CONSTRAINTS OF MARTIAL LAW.
IN REF A WE PROJECTED THE "UNBALANCED POLITICAL SETTING"
IN WHICH THE CAMPAIGN AND THE ELECTIONS WOULD BE
CONDUCTED AND THIS HAS BEEN CLEARLY BORNE OUT IN THE
PAST SEVERAL WEEKS. WITH A LACK OF EVEN ELEMENTAL
SUBTELTY, GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED RESOURCES HAVE BEEN
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MARSHALLED AND EXPENDED TO ADVANCE THE KBL CANDIDATES. THE CARROT (E.G., PROMISES OF PAY RAISES TO SCHOOL TEACHERS AND OTHER CIVIL SERVANTS) HAS BEEN USED IN HEAVY COMBINATION WITH THE STICK (E.G., THINLY VEILED THREATS TO GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES TO VOTE KBL, OR ELSE...). THIS SORT OF THING IS NOT NEW TO THE PHILIPPINES, BUT IT TAKES ON A LARGER AND MORE INSIDIOUS DIMENSION IN THE MARTIAL LAW CONTEXT, AND EXPECTATIONS OF POST-ELECTION RETRIBUTION ARE WIDESPREAD.

8. GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED FACILITIES HAVE BEEN SUBSTANTIALLY DENIED TO THE LABAN, ESPECIALLY IN THE FIELD OF MEDIA. THERE HAVE BEEN GOP GESTURES: AQUINO WAS AWARDED HIS ONE-SHOT ON TELEVISION (A MAJOR TURNING POINT IN THE CAMPAIGN) AND HIS SINGLE PRESS INTERVIEW; AN UNDERGROUND OPPOSITION NEWSPAPER IS TOLERATED AND MODEST MEDIA COVERAGE IS AFFORDED TO OPPOSITION ACTIVITIES AND STATEMENTS. BUT THE MARCOSES AND THEIR COLLEAGUES DOMINATE THE PRESS AND AIR WAVES.

9. WE CAN ONLY SPECULATE HOW MARCOS VIEWS THIS REPORTEDLY HIGH ACCEPTANCE OF AQUINO AND THE LABAN BY THE METRO MANILA ELECTORATE. WE HAVE HEARD SOME FRETTING BY GOP OFFICIALS THAT THE ELECTIONS ARE DIVISIVE AND DESTRUCTIVE AND ARE ONLY BEING HELD TO PLEASE THE AMERICANS. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF COMMENTS TO THE EFFECT THAT MARCOS' BIG MISTAKE WAS TO PERMIT AQUINO TO RUN, THAT HE SHOULD NEVER HAVE DONE SO, THAT THE GENIE IS NOW OUT OF THE BOTTLE.

10. THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT MARCOS IS FACED WITH THE SERIOUS DILEMMA OF WHETHER OR NOT TO PERMIT AQUINO AND OTHER OPPOSITIONISTS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH APPARENT POPULAR

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WILL, TO WIN SEATS IN THE NEW LEGISLATURE. ONE STORY GOING THE ROUND IS THAT MARCOS, INCREASINGLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE GROWING ROMUALDEZ POWER, WILL LET THE CHIPS FALL WHERE THEY MAY AND PERMIT IMELDA TFO FINISH DOWN THE LIST TO PUT HER IN HER PLACE. WE DO NOT CREDIT SUCH FANTASY. THERE SEEMS LITTLE DOUBT IMELDA MUST BE THE TOPNOTCHER. SHE, AFTER ALL, CARRIES THE MARCOS NAME AND IS THE SHINING SYMBOL OF THE NEW SOCIETY. A SECOND RATE SHOWING BY IMELDA WOULD REFLECT BADLY ON MARCOS AND HIS ADMINISTRATION. SIMILARLY AQUINO AND THE LABAN, THE PRIMARY ANTI-NEW SOCIETY SYMBOLS, MUST BE DEFEATED DECISIVELY, SINCE THEIR VICTORY WOULD BE A PSYCHOLOGICAL BODY BLOW TO THE MARCOS REGIME.

11. THE END-OF-MARCH GOP POLL SHOWING A KBL SWEEP IS A LARGE STRAW IN THE WIND. SO TOO ARE THE PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS DURING A MARH 31 CAMAPGIN SPEECH IN WHICH HE WARNED OF THE DANGER OF ELECTING EVEN ONE LABAN CANDIDATE. ONE SUCH, THE PRESS CITED MARCOS AS SAYING, "WOULD CONSTITUTE A POINT OF INFECTION THAT COULD LATER ON INFECT THE ENTIRE GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE."

12. WE PROJECT THE FOLLOWING RESULTS FOR THE METRO MANILA RACE:

(A) THE MOST LIKELY OUTCOME IS A KBL SWEEP OF ALL 21 SEATS, WITH IMELDA IN NUMBER ONE POSITION. SUCH LABAN SUPPORTERS AS SENATOR SALONGA BELIEVE THIS WILL BE THE OUTCOME ANNOUNCED BY THE COMMISSION ON ELECTIONS DESPITE THE STRENGTH THE LABAN HAS MANIFESTED DURING THE CAMPAIGN. SUCH A RESULT WOULD LACK

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CREDIBILITY AND UNDERMINE THE REGIME'S HOPE OF DEPICTING THE ELECTION AS A SINGIFICANT STEP TOWARD NORMALIZATION. BUT IT WOULD AFFORD MARCOS SOME BASIS, HOWEVER SHAKY, FOR CONTINUING TO CLAIM PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE OF THE NEW SOCEITY.

(B) A SECOND LESS LIKELY OUTCOME WOULD BE A NEAR

KBL SWEEP, WITH PERHAPS ONE TO THREE LABAN MEMBERS, EXCLUDING AQUINO, PLACING SOMEWHERE DOWN THE LIST OF SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES. THIS RESULT WOULD GIVE THE PROCESS LITTLE ADDED CREDIBILITY, PARTICULARLY BECAUSE OF THE ABSENCE OF AQUINO AMONG THE WINNERS.

(C) AN EVEN LESS LIKELY POSSIBLE OUTCOME WOULD BE A NEAR KBL SWEEP, WITH AQUINO AND ONE OR TWO OTHER LABAN CANDIDATES INCLUDED SOMEWHERE DOWN THE WINNERS LIST. THIS WOULD GIVE THE ELECTION A CERTAIN CREDIBILITY, BUT IT WOULD DIM THE LUSTER OF THE KBL VICTORY.
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MORE IMPORTANT, IT COULD SEVERELY UNDERCUT MARCOS' SIX-YEAR EFFORT TO NEUTRALIZE THE AQUINO THREAT TO THE NEW SOCIETY. WHETHER AQUINO WOULD BE PERMITTED TO SIT IN THE NEW PARLIAMENT, AN AQUINO VICTORY AT THE POLLS COULD CAL INTO SERIOUS QUESTION HIS CONTINUED INCARCERATION BY THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT.

13. WE BELIEVE MARCOS IS PREPARED TO DO WHATEVER IS NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE A KBL SWEEP OR NEAR SWEEP AND HAS SO INSTRUCTED HIS LIEUTENANTS. ONE MAJOR MECHANISM, FOR EXAMPLE, IS THE "FLYING VOTER" DEVICE. ACCORDING TO ONE KNOWLEDGEABLE SOURCE, 200,000 KBL SUPPORTERS FROM THE PROVINCES TO THE NORTH AND SOUTH OF MANILA ARE BEING BROUGHT IN TO REGISTER AND VOTE IN THE CITY. THE PRICE IS SAID TO BE 100 PESOS PER VOTE. FURTHER, SENATOR SALONGA HAS TOLD US THAT THE KBL HAS ALREADY PRINTED AND MARKED ONE MILLION FAKE BALLOTS FOR USE IN THE PROCESS AS NECESSARY TO ASSURE AN OVERWHELMING KBL VICTORY.

14. WE CAN ANTICIPATE THAT THE OPPOSITION WILL REACT WITH VOCAL OUTRAGE TO SUCH GROSS MANIPULATION OF THE ELECTIONS BY MARCOS, AND A BURST OF PUBLIC DISORDER IS A DISTINCT POSSIBILITY. SENATOR RODRIGO IS ALREADY ASSERTING PUBLICLY THAT MARCOS INTENDS TO RESORT TO "MASSIVE FRAUD". AQUINO IN HIS OPEN LETTER TO SCHOOL TEACHERS (MANILA 5229) SPEAKS DARKLY OF "FRATRICIDAL CONFLICT" IF THE ELECTORAL RESULTS ARE MANIPULATED. A LABAN CAMPAIGN WORKERS HAS TOLD US THAT, ON THE PREMISE OF MAJOR FRAUD BY THE REGIME, THE OPPOSITION PLANS TO HOLD POST-ELECTION "INDIGNATION RALLIES" AND PREPARE INFORMATION KITS FOR DISTRIBUTION TO THE LOCAL AND FOREIGN PRESS AND TO DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS.
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15. IF EVENTS UNFOLD ALONG THE FOREGOING LINES,
WE ARE PROBABLY IN FOR A DIFFICULT PERIOD OF TENSION
AND UNCERTAINTY.
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Message Attributes

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